



PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS

Robert Sella

nudity, same-sex couplings and foul-mouthed political harangues make the play vivid, honest and compelling. Frank sexual dialogue between gay couples, and comic relief in the gossip and jokes of yesterday's sexual activities, make the play incredibly effective to a gay and lesbian audience. The two-part play works best if seen in sequence, although many stage fans feel that each part stands on its own, especially if theatergoers study the detailed program to pick up events in the other play.

Angels in America tells the story of two New York couples; the action starts in 1984. The first couple is a gay-male pair. Louis—intense, Jewish, guilt-ridden—has just buried his grandmother. His lover of four and a half years, Prior, has bad news to share—he's just been diagnosed with AIDS. Louis, who can be brutally honest, tells Prior that he cannot deal with illness, he can't face death. The relationship flounders as Prior is hospitalized.

The second couple is a Mormon husband-and-wife pair. Joe, a promising young lawyer who works as chief clerk for a Federal Court in New York, is acting strange. He "takes long walks" late at night to unsavory spots in Central Park. His wife, Harper, is close to a nervous breakdown—she downs handfuls of Valium to make it through the day. When Joe's secret homosexual lifestyle surfaces, he meets and is attracted to Louis. He leaves his wife and moves in with Lou.

The real-life Roy Cohn, the notorious homophobic gay political figure, is also being treated for AIDS, but he insists that it's "liver cancer." He pulls strings to get in on the then-rare AZT treatment. He wants Joe to take a job in Washington, D.C., and become one of "Roy's Boys": specially placed, bright young men who will do favors for Cohn as he faces disbarment and other legal battles.

At the peak of this sweeping soap-opera tale of domestic lives, an Angel crashes through the roof to tell Prior that he is a prophet and the future of the world depends on him. Part One ends. Wow! Talk

about a plot complication.

In Part Two, Prior is a reluctant prophet. The story continues with the arrival of Joe's mother from Utah ("the only unpleasant Mormon I've ever met," one character notes), a visit to Heaven ("a city much like San Francisco"), and the interweaving of the lives of the key characters (when Joe's mother becomes involved in Prior's care, Prior

Angels is the success of this double casting. The women in the original New York production were so well cast and so successful in creating male and female characters that few opening night critics noticed that the doubling continually crossed gender lines and omitted the "rave" reviews the actresses truly deserved.

The July 26 Portland premiere of *Angels in*

able by calling 796-0200.

Angels in America plays a combination of matinees and evenings, with ticket prices ranging from \$5 to \$40. That's not a misprint. Portland's Broadway Theater Season is aware that many people who will want to see *Angels* cannot afford traditional theater ticket prices, and it has established the \$5 price range. Portland Opera and PBTS deserve a



PHOTO BY DAN REST

Left to right: Peter Birkenhead, Kate Goehring and Philip Earl Johnson

introduces her as "my ex-lover's lover's Mormon mother").

A host of other characters populate the story—all played by the basic cast of eight actors. Playwright Kushner wrote the play to be performed with the limited cast and incorporates gender-bending into the script. Most of the untraditional casting finds the women in the cast doubling in men's roles. One key to individual productions of

America is a benefit for the fifth annual "Fabric of Life" fund-raiser. A gala will take place in the theater lobby and in the street out front prior to the opening. Hors d'oeuvres and wines will be featured at the pre-curtain sidewalk cabaret performance of *Summer Angels*, *Some Are Not*, and desserts, champagne and coffee drinks will highlight the two intermissions. Benefit prices start at \$25. Complete details on the fund-raiser are avail-

able by calling 796-0200. Complete ticket information is available through TicketMaster at 224-4400. Signed performances for the deaf and hard of hearing are scheduled for July 28 and Aug. 4.

If you're only going to see one stage event this year, make it *Angels in America*. It truly is a theatrical event that will never be forgotten by gay or lesbian stage fans.